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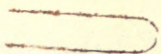
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"Then and Now"

Hastings and Thanet Building Society



7 Mercery Lane · Canterbury · Kent





The Board Room

The Reception Office





Foreword

In these fast-moving and modern times, when most architecture is tall and angular and with few embellishments, it is most interesting to reflect on the past when wages were low and craftsmen had more time to indulge in their skills.

In the rebuilding of the premises in Mercery Lane we have, with the assistance of our Architects, Mr. H. Campbell Ashenden, M.C., F.R.I.B.A., F.R.I.C.S., and Mr. John Clark, L.R.I.B.A., provided on the ground floor a modern office for the convenience of our members and business friends, at the same time retaining on the first floor, as far as possible, the old features of the building.

In connection with the opening of the Branch, the Society is indebted to the Cathedral and City Archivist, Doctor William Urry, for the following history of Mercery Lane, where our new offices are situated.

The New Premises of
the Hastings and Thanet
Building Society
No. 7 Mercery Lane

THESE PREMISES lie at the very heart of historic Canterbury. There are very few sites, even in the ancient Cathedral cities of England as a whole, where the story of a given piece of ground can be carried back to such a remote date.

The ground plan of Canterbury as we know it, within the city walls, has remained unchanged for at least 800 years, and indeed there is some evidence to suggest that it had assumed its present form in the late Anglo-Saxon period. The Buttermarket may indeed be the *placea civitatis* mentioned in record of a grant made by King Ethelred the Unready in 1003. Mercery Lane, bearing its present title (*Merceria*), was in existence in the twelfth century. About the year 1150 there was an individual called Berner who was acting as Steward (*senescallus, dapifer*) to the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury. All the greater monasteries maintained such an official, whose duty it was to protect the interests of the monks against aggressors, and generally to deal with layfolk on more equal terms. Berner *senescallus* acted as a principal witness to conveyances of Cathedral property, and is once mentioned as early as 1144, when the monks came to an agreement with the knight William of Malling, otherwise of Thanington, in connection with the manor of Patching in Sussex, which was ecclesiastical property. A fellow-witness with Berner was Asketill of Ratling, whose son, Alan of Ratling, enjoyed the distinction, some years later, of excommunication by Archbishop Thomas Becket.

It appears (as far as can be deduced from available documents) that Berner the Steward held (about A.D. 1150) certain ground on the western side of Mercery Lane. It seems to have spanned the boundary between Nos. 6 and 7, that is to say, it covered Lefevre's display window (at the end nearest the High Street) and much of No. 7, the new premises of the Hastings and Thanet Building Society. We know several facts about the northern portion of the Berner's holding (No. 6), and it may be worth while mentioning something of its history, since it formed such a close neighbour to what is now No. 7.

Berner the Steward had a wife Liveva, and the pair had more than

one daughter. Berner was evidently dead by 1155, when another Steward, Bartholomew *Senescallus*, was in office. Liveva lived a few years more, and at some point of time (before 1167) settled scattered pieces of her property in Canterbury on the nuns of Minster in Sheppey. The occasion for these gifts was the fact that one of her daughters (unnamed) had taken the veil in that religious house. The ground of Berner in Mercery Lane is not mentioned in surviving documents as transferred with the new nun, but we soon find that the Sisters at Minster are in possession of ground substantially representing No. 6, and may well guess that they acquired it at this time and for this reason. About 1180 one Arnold Chich (Chic, Chig, etc.) became tenant to the nuns. Canterbury Cathedral had been steadily acquiring the frontage and when (as we shall see) the other piece of Berner's ground, substantially No. 7, passed into the possession of the monks they now became possessors of the whole of this side of Mercery Lane, apart from No. 6, a fact which seems to have irked them. So in 1187 they came to terms with the nuns over No. 6. The ladies surrendered the ground *in vico Mercerie*, as the relevant charter puts it, said to be in the occupation of Arnald de Chiche, together with other property of theirs, being ground of Ingenulph the plumber, son of Norman the plumber, represented today by part of the open space at the back of Messrs. Dolcis and W. H. Smith on the line of the old Iron Bar Lane. The nuns acquired an interest, it may be remarked, in ground of Ingenulph through grant by Liveva, widow of Berner, evidently when her daughter took the veil at Minster. Arnold Chich was a leading citizen and a member of a distinguished Canterbury family which gave many Aldermen and Provosts to the medieval city. Arnold was a goldsmith and is with high probability identical with the Arnold *aurifaber* who in 1204 or 1205 was commissioned to make a golden goblet for King John himself. The fee was two marks, a considerable sum (perhaps £80 or £90 today—it is clear that the King supplied the bullion).

Next door to the holding of Arnold Chich was that of Reginald the Goldsmith, i.e. substantially No. 7. We know a good deal about the layout of twelfth-century Canterbury, much more so in fact than in the case of any other English city, since there are available some remarkable contemporary surveys. In 1162 there was a devastating fire, when Canterbury, apart from the monastic houses, was more or

less flattened. The city was so badly damaged that even the hard-fisted officials of King Henry II remitted some royal dues at this period. As quarrels arose when citizens started to stake out claims in the wilderness of charred timbers, the monks set to work on a survey to establish their own, and their tenants' rights. Unfortunately, since the monks are not (apparently) yet in possession of the sites of Nos. 6 or 7, these do not find a place in the survey, though on the corner of Mercery Lane we may find one Sigar son of Anser, and next door the family of Alfred de Welles, part of whose ground seems to represent the southern (i.e. toward's the High Street) flank of No. 7.

A list of Cathedral tenants drawn up about 1180 shows a certain Reginald the Goldsmith in occupation of ground in Mercery Lane once connected with Berner the Steward, but now in the hands of the monks. Evidently Berner the Steward, late in his life (or Liveva, his wife, after his death), has ceded the ground to the Cathedral.

We know the precise frontage occupied by Reginald, and where it occurred in the lane, since definite measurements are given at a later date, as will be shown below. The northern (furthest from the High Street) boundary coincides almost exactly with the northern limit of the present No. 7. However, Reginald's frontage was narrower, leaving a few feet on the flank towards the High Street in other hands. Reginald took up the property from the monks themselves, so their grant to him must have taken place after its transfer from the family of Berner the Steward into the possession of the Cathedral. The procedure common at this date would be for a grantor to hand over property to a tenant for an initial premium called the *gersuma*, retaining a smaller, annual, payment. In this case the annual payment (recorded in the Cathedral rent list of *circa* 1180) is half a mark (i.e. 6s. 8d.—perhaps £20 in modern money). In the absence of the charter of grant, the *gersuma* is not known.

Reginald the Goldsmith is more than a mere name. He had several pieces of property in and around Canterbury, some in the region of Old Ruttington Lane and Broad Street. In fact he had a house there, at the point where the lane joins Broad Street. Perhaps he let this out to tenants, or again it is not impossible that he lived there and did business in central Canterbury. There is some suggestion that even in this early period there were business men who did not live over their

businesses but commuted (on foot). It is certainly unlikely that a goldsmith's business was sited in Broad Street. In this age goldsmiths were becoming bankers, as well as acting as craftsman. In twelfth-century Canterbury, as much as in twentieth-century Canterbury, you expect to find banks around Mercery Lane rather than in Broad Street. Reginald must have been a man of some wealth. In 1179 he took up a stretch of 40 acres on the left of the Littlebourne Road, somewhere near the junction with Stodmarsh Road. The ground was to be held of St. Augustine's Abbey, and consent of King Henry II himself was secured for the conveyance, under terms of a special charter issued at Westminster, probably at the end of August 1179. The King had come to Canterbury on 23rd August, so perhaps consent to the arrangement had been secured on this occasion.

It was indeed a famous occasion. King Louis VII of France had been childless for thirty years. At last a Dauphin was born, but years later the boy was lost while hunting, suffered exposure in the forest, and fell sick unto death. His father in desperation crossed to England in order to pray at the tomb of Blessed Thomas, whose record of cures of the sick was famous all over Europe, indeed even into the realms of the infidels. Henry II, hearing that his great rival had entered his kingdom, rode post-haste to Canterbury to meet him. It was now that Louis made his famous grant of 100 *muids* of French wine (a *very* large amount) to the monks, and gave his celebrated ruby called the *Régale*, which remained affixed to Becket's shrine until 1538, when Henry VIII seized the shrine, jewels and all. We can be very sure that the occupants of Mercery Lane watched both kings as they rode off together to Dover (26th August, 1179). The boy recovered and grew up to become the French King Philip Augustus who captured the great Norman frontier fortress of Château Gaillard from King John, resulting in the loss of Normandy away from the English Crown.

In the year 1198 there was another disastrous fire at Canterbury and most, or all, of the city was again laid waste. Once more the monks decided to make a survey. This time it was carried out in very great detail, and even measurements of the different holdings were supplied. The surveyors worked across Canterbury street by street and house by house, and as a result we have a word-picture without parallel of a medieval English city.

When they came to Mercery Lane the surveyors started at the

Buttermarket end and worked towards the High Street. They first noticed a small slaughteryard, centering on the depression in the frontage between Lefevre's window and Messrs. Walker and Harris' premises. Next in the schedule comes James of the Gate. He was a great man in Canterbury in the days of King John and Richard I, serving as Alderman of Northgate Ward, probably as Head of the Guild (perhaps we may say that today he would be Chairman of the Chamber of Trade), and as the first Mayor of Canterbury (in 1215). Before James became Mayor there were two Provosts who acted in effect as joint Mayors. The year 1215 saw the Magna Carta crisis and as the crisis died down (it had been particularly acute at Canterbury) things returned to normal, the office of Mayor disappeared, and the Provosts returned, until the Mayoralty re-emerged in 1448. James did not live in Mercery Lane, but at his stone house in Palace Street, opposite the Palace gates, whence he took his name. The actual occupant of the ground in the lane (a section of Lefevre's windows, roughly opposite the junction between Nos. 15 and 16), was a certain Hugh the Goldsmith. We know one thing about him, namely that he was not a good business man. About 1190 he married a girl named Regina de Crèveœur, member of the Norman family who were lords of Blean manor. When he married they paid off his debts as a dowry for his bride. He died many years later, deep in debt again. Regina or her family once more paid off the debts, and at the same time financed her son, Thomas f. Hugh, for his journey to Jerusalem. Perhaps he was setting out on the Fifth Crusade (1217). A mercer named Suan succeeded Hugh as tenant. Next along the lane comes Robert, son of Richard, a wealthy citizen who was a benefactor both to the Cathedral and to St. Augustine's Abbey. After Robert comes Arnold Buche, co-tenant with a certain John, and another man, also called John. Next is Arnold Chic (more or less at No. 6) whom we have met above. He enjoys a frontage of 15 ft., as does his neighbour, Reginald the Goldsmith, strongly suggesting that an ancient holding of 30 ft. frontage has been cut into two. The present frontage of No. 7 is 21½ ft. and the remainder, unaccounted for by Reginald's ground, is occupied according to the survey of 1198 or soon after by 'the daughter of Alfred of Welles'. As shown above, the family had interests here in 1166. It is unlikely that she lived here. Her family were probably manorial lords (at Well at Ickham) and no doubt a citizen-tenant actually dwelt

Sciant presentes et futuri quod Ego Thomas filius Reginaldi
 conventui ecclesie sancte tuncensis Cantuariensis scoppam mea
 me primum de illis accepit vendidit. Et per hac venditio
 hodie mei rectore. facti et regimine. et tunc et huiusmodi
 et burgum Cunctis Cunctis. et in terra de burgum.
 seminare solidos sexlingos. Et sciendum quod in die quod
 de corpore meo. Iste ut hec venditio et accessio mea fir
 mei munimine confirmari. et in testimonium fidele
 priori et conventui sigillo meo signato. et Acto com
 no meo. et Jone filio huius tunc ipsius. Huius
 Baldewini. Hug. Aurifabri. Siano meo. Arno

Site (approx.) of No. 7 Mercery Lane, c. 1205. Grant by Thomas, son
 his shop in Mercery Lane, previously held by his father, Reginald. The
 Monks and is now being returned to them. On this site and on adjoining
 Merceria (middle of the Seco

ritabri uendidi & concessi in ppetuum dno p[er]u &
 rectori g[er]m de illis tenui. & g[er]m Reginold' pater
 concessione mea sine aliquo retinemento in
 tota in capitali curia ecc[lesi]e s[an]c[t]e trinitatis Cant[uarie] &
 p[er]u & quere[n]t[ur] ecc[lesi]e xpi Cant[uarie]. dederunt michi
 manum & uendidi hoc tenementu[m] n[on] habui heredem
 t[er]ribil[em] sic in eternu[m]: plene cartam meam sigilli
 n[on] exproph[et]i duplicem. uno pari dato p[re]dicto
 in custodia annu[m] Cant[uarie]. Huius testib[us]. Goldswi
 . Theonico Aunfabu. Ioh[ann]e m[er]cio. Nicholio fit
 eke. Arnoldo g[er]m.



inald the Goldsmith, to Prior and Monks of Canterbury Cathedral of
 thirty shillings sterling. The site was previously in the hands of the
 , the Monks proceeded to erect a great stone house. Note the name
 (Cathedral Archives)

on the site. Possibly indeed, Reginald himself might have been a sub-tenant to her, uniting the two holdings. The rest of the frontage towards the High Street is taken up by the holding of 'Anser'. This man must have been dead for nearly half a century, and the probable occupant by about 1200 is Eudo f. Eudo. f. Sigar f. Anser. Eudo is on the corner (Barber's, tobacconist) and next to him in the High Street is William Winedai (Winedei), roughly on the site of Hilton's shop.

The frequent fires had unnerved the monks, and soon after 1200 they and the citizens decided to make some changes. All round Canterbury stone houses arose, supposedly fireproof. The Mercery Lane corner was cleared (perhaps it had never been rebuilt after the fire in 1198), and a stone house was planned, embracing the ground of William Winedai, right round as far as and including that of Reginald the Goldsmith, possibly with that of his neighbour, Arnold Chich. It was necessary to buy out the rights of occupants. The charter executed by Reginald the Goldsmith's son Thomas, ceding his rights and those of his father, who is probably now dead, in Mercery Lane, has survived (in the Cathedral Archives), as has a charter in the same handwriting, clearly executed at the same period, of Arnold Chich, suggesting that his ground, too, was included in the site of the stone house.

At the same time, or close thereto, the monks took over the corner holding of 'Anser' ('Anser' is clearly used as a surname), for which they paid the sum of 25 marks, or £16 13s. 4d., amounting to perhaps £1,000 or more in modern money, clearly not the full value of a site in the centre of the medieval business area. However, we do not know all the conditioning factors. The monks were lords of the soil, and 'Anser', i.e. of course one of the two Eudos descended from Anser mentioned above, was the tenant at 'Gavelkind', the ancient Kentish tenure, and how much claim either lord or tenant exercised on the ground we do not know. Thomas, son of Reginald the Goldsmith, parted with his ground on the site of No. 7 for the figure of 60s., perhaps about £200 in modern money, clearly not the full site value. Again we do not know all the factors involved.

As indicated, the charter ceding rights once held by Reginald has survived. A curious feature is the mention of the site as lying in Burgate Ward. Canterbury was divided into six ancient wards, the boundary between Westgate and Burgate Wards coinciding in later centuries

almost exactly with the boundary between Nos. 6 and 7 in Mercery Lane. However, we do not know exactly where the ward boundaries lay in the early thirteenth century. The conveyance is executed by Thomas, son of Reginald the Goldsmith, in connection, as is stated, with ground *in Merceria*, occupied by a shop (*scoppa*). A list of witnesses to the transaction is supplied and in it we find some of the neighbours in Mercery Lane. Arnold 'Gich' occurs, clearly Arnold Chic next door. Hugh the Goldsmith, the improvident husband of Regina de Crèveœur also appears, as does Suan the Mercer. We know that Suan succeeded Hugh as occupant of the holding a few doors away towards the Buttermarket, so perhaps this is about the time that this holding changed hands. John the Mercer is named as another witness, perhaps one of the two Johns who are joint-tenants with Arnold Buche, next door but one to Reginald in the great survey of *circa* 1200. A great man among the witnesses comes not from Mercery Lane, but from Burgate Street. This is Terric (Theoderic) the Goldsmith, who dwelt approximately on the site of the Rediffusion Centre in Burgate. He was a craftsman employing staff, and had, moreover, widespread financial interests. As Keeper of the Royal Exchange in Canterbury he acted as a local exchequer-agent for the Crown, and had business ramifications on behalf of King John stretching to the other end of England. The two principal witnesses are the City Provosts, Goldwin the Mercer, who had a stone house on the site of Messrs. Vye's premises in St. Margaret's Street, and Eudo f. Sigar f. Anser, who attests not only *ex officio*, but as one who has interest in the site at the corner of Mercery Lane.

Archbishop Hubert Walter died in 1205, and a violent quarrel developed between King John and the Church about his successor, eventually named as Stephen Langton. At one stage in the quarrel John drove the monks of Canterbury Cathedral into exile. There is some suggestion that the erection of the great stone house on the corner of Mercery Lane was put into commission before they departed (in 1207). Owing to the disappearance of early rentrolls it is not possible to recover the names of occupants of this stone house with much ease. However, Cathedral tenants were extremely bad at paying rents on time, and large numbers of lists of 'Arrears of Rents' were compiled, one being available for as early as the year 1234. The stone house makes an appearance, under the entry *Domus lapidea in*

Merceria. Some deductions about the shape of this house can be made, though it must be emphasised that these are deductions, and not based on a positive description. It appears that the building may have had a principal entry on the High Street, probably on the site of Messrs. Hilton's shop. The remainder of the frontage running round into the lane was occupied by a series of openings in the stone wall, forming a row of shops. This arrangement seems to be characteristic of a whole group of stone houses being built around the central area at this date, as on the site of Messrs. Lenley, between Butchery Lane and the Buttermarket, where there was a very great stone house, and on the site of Messrs. Murdoch (with much of the Longmarket area). At the Mercery Lane house the entrance, probably with a shop and with the upstairs rooms, was in the hands of one tenant, while the remaining shops, at the corner and in the lane, were occupied by others. The principal tenant seems to have been a man named Benedict, who was 2s. 9d. behind with his rent in 1234, according to the roll in the Cathedral Archives. Shop No. 1, *in angulo*, on the corner of the lane, was in the hands of one Richard Bunch, 5s. 3d. behind with his rent. Shop No. 2 round in the lane was in the hands of a certain Andrew, 3s. behind, of which he paid 15½d., finally clearing off the balance. No. 2 shelters Thomas de Here, 3s. behind. Shop No. 5 (and here we are very probably level with the Hastings and Thanet premises) is occupied by 'the son of Living' (a good old Anglo-Saxon name), who beats all his neighbours in being 8s. behind with his rent, which he pays off in sums of 20d., 40d. and 16d., plus the balance. Shop No. 6 of the stone house, which may perhaps represent the Buttermarket flank of No. 7 (i.e. No. 7 in the modern numbering), is in the hands of Benedict, most probably the Benedict who was principal occupant of the stone house. Next comes a wooden house, which has apparently been erected (despite the phobia about fire) on the other holdings along the rest of the lane. Large numbers of the 'Lists of Arrears' survive in the Cathedral Archives, and it would be possible to evoke from them a long succession of tenants grudgingly paying out instalments of pence to their monastic landlords down until the late fourteenth century.

The stone house, in fact, lasted nearly 200 years. Then there came a change in fashion. The group of stone houses all around the Buttermarket and the High Street were torn down and replaced by a series



The Chequers Inn Yard, 1845 (20 years before the destruction of the western (right-hand) wing). The yard is cluttered up with inner yards, and the entrance has been narrowed. The galleries have been closed in at first-floor level. No. 7 is at the extreme left-hand side

of great wooden buildings, probably all intended to serve as inns. This was the grand age of the Canterbury Pilgrimage and the monks prudently determined to corner a large proportion of this tourist traffic by building what was in effect a number of up-to-date hotels. The monks already collected substantial sums in offerings in the Cathedral money boxes, so they proposed to make a double profit. The stone house on Mercery Lane now gave way to one of the most famous of all medieval inns, famous not merely in Canterbury, but, indeed, all over the world. For here was erected the *Chequers*. Its chief claim to fame is, of course, its association with Geoffrey Chaucer. It is doubtful, unfortunately, whether this claim can be sustained.

Let us look at some probabilities and facts. The visit of Chaucer and his company of pilgrims took place almost certainly about 1385. It is agreed that he was at work on the *Canterbury Tales* by 1386 or 1387. Now the story of the building of the *Chequers* is recorded in the Cathedral Archives, in a chronicle entered in spare corners of an early account book. The progress of work on the vast wooden inn can be accurately dated. It was started in the second year of the priorate

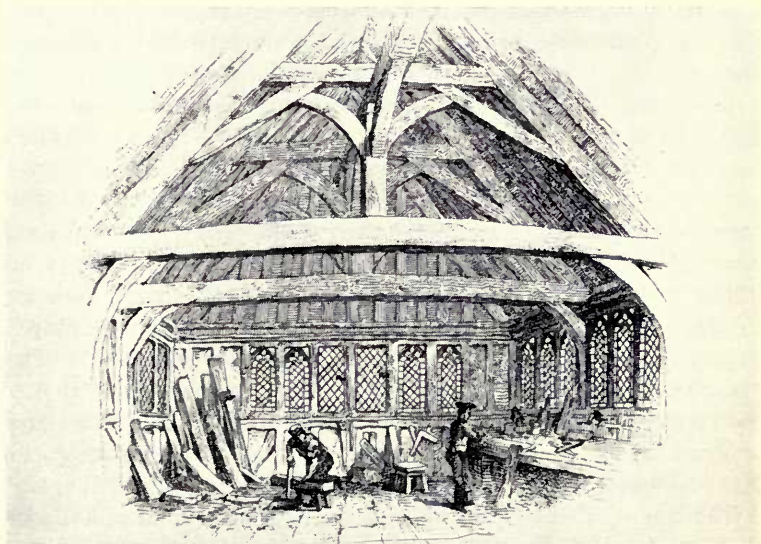
of Thomas Chillenden, the great Prior-builder of Canterbury, that is in the year 1392-3. In this year £174 14s. 4d. was spent. In the next year £350 was expended on the work, with further building costs of £342 in the year 1394-5, making a total of £966 14s. 4d. The *Chequers* represents something like a £100,000 contract in modern terms, especially if the cost of the splendid oaken timbers is brought in (possibly not included in the figures mentioned). We may see, therefore, that the *Chequers* was not finished until a point of time nearly ten years after the supposed date of the visit of Chaucer to Canterbury.

It is not usually realised that Chaucer never reached Canterbury in his recitation of the Pilgrims' adventures, though, of course, he actually got to Canterbury in fact. The tale of the Pilgrim's arrival was written up many years later in engaging detail, but in a much inferior hand. The anonymous writer tries to be funny, like Chaucer, but somehow misses the point. However, he does, in fact, mention the *Chequers*. By the time he wrote, the building was a well-known inn (in fact, he says that it was well-known) where one would naturally imagine that visitors to Canterbury might put up, while the author failed to realise that it was, in fact, not old enough to have sheltered Chaucer and his company.

The *Chequers* was a noble building. Constructed of seasoned oaken beams 7 in. x 7 in., it occupied a frontage of 90 ft. on the High Street with two great wings, one 110 ft. in length, lying along Mercery Lane, and the other (somewhat shorter) running back from the High Street. There was a courtyard in the middle, with an entrance approximately on the site of the Singer Sewing Machine shop. There were three floors, one just above ground level, and a first floor embodying rooms for guests, with a top floor beneath the great open roof. There was no enclosed corridor as in a modern building, but a gallery open to the weather, on first floor level, running round the courtyard. Part of this former gallery is now brought into the Hastings and Thanet premises (at the back). The massive post which is a conspicuous feature of this first floor represents part of the lath and timber wall separating the gallery from guest rooms. In days before chambermaids and waiters (or guests) could read it was useless to put numbers on guest room doors in hotels, and each entrance bore a sign, such as a crown, a *fleur-de-lys*, or a rose. Such remarks as '*Fleur-de-lys* does not want to

be disturbed' or 'Rose wants to be called at dawn' or 'Crown wants his boots' must have been heard many a time in the *Chequers Inn* in the fifteenth century. Unfortunately, we have not been able to make the calculation which would arrive at the symbol on the room door approximating to the upper chamber now in the hands of the Hastings and Thanet section, and serving as the Board Room.

At the first- and second-storey level there were rows of windows, some 27 in. wide, each equipped with a head of Gothic tracery. One such window-head can still be seen (from the outside) at the level of the top storey, near the corner of Mercery Lane. During restoration at No. 7 some windows, minus, unfortunately, their tracery, came to light. The vertical timbers were still partly *in situ* and the mortices where the tracery fitted, together with slots in which ran shutters, were disclosed. These are still partly visible. There was no window-glass, and the shutters were probably formed of frames across which was stretched oiled canvas, translucent enough to let in some light. Gothic windows of much the same kind (but without tracery) are still to be seen at



Pilgrims' communal dormitory at the Chequers. This is the inside of the right-hand wing above (p. 15). The left-hand wing, on Mercery Lane, was of the same form when finished in 1395

Messrs. Lenley's premises on the Buttermarket, erected in the same period.

The top floor over Mercery Lane formed a vast communal dormitory for second-class Pilgrims, while the better off occupied the individual rooms below. No internal view of the Mercery Lane wing before subdivision has survived, but the corresponding wing, across the courtyard, was never divided up, and we have a view of it made in the nineteenth century some years before its destruction. A fine hall-like chamber is disclosed, with great rafters and a kingpost roof. The kingpost roof has not survived intact above No. 7 Mercery Lane, though it was found to be in excellent shape high above Messrs. Barber's at the corner when an entry was made during repairs in 1950.

Though it appears necessary to deprive the *Chequers* of an association with Chaucer, some compensation in the field of literary and theatrical history can perhaps be made. Wandering players constantly came to Canterbury in the sixteenth and earlier seventeenth centuries. There was then no theatre building at Canterbury and the players regularly performed on a stage erected in the inn yard of the *Chequers*, the galleries serving as stalls for the audience. It must be fairly certain that the youthful Christopher Marlowe made his first acquaintance with the professional drama in the inn yard of the *Chequers* standing down among the 'groundlings', since his improvident father would hardly be likely to find for him the price of a place up in the gallery (regularly the expensive seats in those days). The wandering players were by no means a rabble of third-rate comics and ranters, for they included the great performers of the age. Runs at the London theatres were short in the sixteenth century, since with the small population of that day the potential audience was quickly used up, and the most successful play was soon touring the provinces. There were indeed great names heard of in country towns. Dare we suggest it? The audiences in the 1590s, sitting in the gallery, part of which is now incorporated in the Hastings and Thanet offices, could they have watched the up-and-coming actor-playwright William Shakespeare? It is well within the bounds of possibility and, indeed, probability.

The loss of Chaucer may in actual fact be made good in a Tudor context. On 15th September, 1592, there was an assault committed 'in the parish of St. Andrew and in the Ward of Westgate'. There was a small district in Canterbury where these two jurisdictions over-

lapped, in the area covered by the *Chequers* and in the adjacent street, embodying the front of housing where now stands Lloyds Bank. At any rate, the assault took place either inside or only just without the *Chequers*. The victim was the local tailor and musician William Corkine, probably father to William Corkine the younger, another musician, who in later years composed the air to Christopher Marlowe's *Come Live with me and be my Love*. The aggressor was none other than Marlowe himself.

The structure of the *Chequers* followed the pattern of the great stone house in separating the frontage on Mercery Lane up to the corner from the building as a whole. Edward Hasted, writing in the eighteenth century, reports a tradition that until the mid-seventeenth century Mercery Lane was characterised by an arcade either side, running through the space covered by shop windows today. He says that in the chaos of the Civil War and Commonwealth (around 1650), occupants of the various buildings moved down and appropriated adjacent sections for themselves. We may imagine, therefore, in earlier days a long covered way from the corner of Mercery Lane along to the Buttermarket, probably occupied by stall-keepers. This seems to account for the extreme difficulty encountered in searching among the archives for evidence of tenants along this frontage in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. No. 7, therefore, was, at ground floor level, and on the Mercery Lane front, probably in occupation by a long succession of costermongers and other traders.

By the seventeenth century the *Chequers Inn* was failing as such. There are several suggestions that it was never very successful after the pilgrim traffic died away. Even about 1500 the tenant seems to have become bankrupt. Stage by stage segments were cut out of the building which were united with rooms above to constitute separate premises. Since the rooms above seldom coincided with the plan at floor level, there were strange displacements at different storeys, as indeed there still are at No. 7. We know the names of local tradesmen in the eighteenth century while this development was in progress, but, owing to the absence of any street-numbering system, it is impossible to identify any with the Hastings and Thanet premises. It would be interesting to know where Mr. Galant, the hatter, dwelt, who in 1719 had secret meetings of 'non-jurors' in his dwelling in Mercery Lane, refusing to regard George I as King and yearning for the return

of the 'Old Pretender'. It would also be interesting, furthermore, to know the site in Mercery Lane where dwelt the Gray family, kinsmen, so it is said, of the author of the *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, who visited them at Canterbury.

The *Chequers Inn* still remained in the hands of the Cathedral Chapter and supplied them with rents. A great grievance of landowners in the later eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries was the land tax. The landowners were allowed by the Government to compound for the tax and disencumber their estates by a lump sum. Cathedral Chapters were authorised by Act of Parliament to sell off parts of their property to raise funds to buy out the rest. The Dean and Chapter of Canterbury sold off many holdings in the City, such as the *Rose Hotel* (on the site of Messrs. Burton's shop) and the *Chequers*. At the same period street numbering was instituted, and so we now know who lived and worked at No. 7. Piggott's great *Directory* of London and the provinces, published in 1826, shows No. 7 in the hands of Edward Kite, grocer. In the 1840 issue of the *Directory* he has been succeeded by Stephen Cladish, another grocer. The name Cladish was associated with the shop in 1865, when the great disaster overtook the *Chequers*. The whole of the western wing, with its splendid top storey, still not subdivided, and with all its range of Gothic windows, together with the frontage on the High Street, including the entrance to the inn yard, was burnt down. Scorch marks from the flames across the yard are still visible on the backs of Nos. 7 and 8. From about 1840, it may here be remarked, the occupant of No. 8 was the well-known publisher and bookseller, Henry Ward. No. 7 remained a grocer's shop until late in its history. Names of occupants recovered from local directories run:

1882	Scott (Thomas)	Grocer and merchant.
1893	Scott (Thomas)	Family grocer.
1894	Holmes (Charles)	Late Thomas Scott, grocer and provision merchant.
1897	Holmes (Charles)	Grocer and provision merchant.
1902	Holmes (Walter C.)	Family grocer and provision merchant.

The last occupants before the Hastings and Thanet Building Society were Messrs. Burgess, grocers, so the structure sees a change in occupation for the first time for at least a century and a half.

HASTINGS AND THANET BUILDING SOCIETY

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